

I CAN CONTROL RESOURCES

Chapter 21: Changing Strategy, Going on the Offensive

Gao Neng was too drained to complain. He just waited to lose a level.

'Some side quest this is,' he thought. 'To hell with it!'

But as he watched the time rapidly ticking away, a sliver of indignation grew in his heart. 'I earned that level-up fair and square. Why should I lose it?'

Besides, the most important thing was that this time, the reward wasn't a beginner's treasure chest, but a random reward!

'A random reward...'

'Will it randomly give me a Transformer? Or at the very least, a cute loli with twin ponytails? If all else fails... how about a divine book that can materialize weapons, or a cosmic portal that lets me travel the universe?'

"CREAK."

Just as he was lost in thought, the conference room door was pushed open.

Two soldiers entered, propping up Tang Weiwei and Ah Si.

Gao Neng glanced at Tang Weiwei. He was in a pathetic state. His face was swollen like a pig's head, and his own head was wrapped in thick, blood-soaked bandages. If it weren't for his hate-filled eyes, Gao Neng truly wouldn't have recognized him.

As for Ah Si...

...he was completely unrecognizable.

He was wrapped up like a mummy from head to toe, with thick plaster casts on his legs and arms. He limped along, and Gao Neng had no idea what could have happened to him.

In fact, Tang Weiwei and Ah Si could be considered extremely lucky just to be alive.

Ah Si had been knocked unconscious by falling debris and collapsed, which saved him from the worst of it. Tang Weiwei, on the other hand, had been swatted by the Iron Dragon's tail and sent flying to the edge of the balcony.

Otherwise, even if the unconscious Shen Ning'Er had no specific target, the Iron Dragon's rampage alone could have smashed them both to death.

"Lieutenant Qin, we didn't do it, I swear! It was him... Gao Neng! He went into Major Shen's room first! By the time we got there, Major Shen was already unconscious!" Tang Weiwei shouted the moment he entered the conference room. He was so agitated that the bandages on his head strained, turning his face a livid color.

"Yes, it was him, Lieutenant Qin! We really didn't do anything... We just wanted to save Major Shen, honestly, that's all..." Ah Si could barely stand, but he still forced himself to speak.

"Save Major Shen?" Qin Tianxiong gave Ah Si a cold glance but didn't call him out on the lie. Instead, he turned to Gao Neng. "Student Gao Neng, do you have any explanation for their words?"

"Huh? Um... who's Major Shen?" Gao Neng asked, blinking.

If it had been anyone else, they would have probably blurted out, 'I'm innocent! They're conspiring to frame me!'

But Gao Neng wasn't just anyone.

He saw the issue with a single glance.

Only someone who had entered Shen Ning'Er's room last night would know her rank as a Major. If he hadn't gone in, how could he possibly know?

"Oh? It seems you really don't know." Qin Tianxiong's eyes narrowed. He then turned back to Tang Weiwei and Ah Si. "In that case... are you two framing him?"

"No, Lieutenant Qin, we're not framing him! Last night, at the hotel entrance, I gave him fifty Alliance Coins to... to..." Tang Weiwei said anxiously.

"To do what?"

"To..."

"Speak!"

"No, that's not right! He gave *me* fifty Alliance Coins to steal the hotel's key card! He wanted to get into Major Shen's room! He had ulterior motives!" Tang Weiwei immediately changed his story.

"Is that so? Gao Neng, did you give Tang Weiwei fifty Alliance Coins to steal the hotel's key card?" Qin Tianxiong asked, turning back to Gao Neng, his expression unreadable.

Gao Neng blinked again. 'Such an obvious lie, and Lieutenant Qin can't see it? He's actually asking me about it? Well, no helping it. I'll just have to play along.'

"I... I didn't give him any money. Besides... besides, I don't have any money. Everyone at the Third Senior High School knows that..." Gao Neng said, holding out his hands.

"But you spent forty Alliance Coins on a room yesterday?"

"Well, actually... he gave the money to me... Here's the remaining ten." Gao Neng fumbled in his pocket, pulled out ten Alliance Coins, and tossed them in front of Tang Weiwei.

"Oh? And why would he give you Alliance Coins?"

"He wanted me to steal a key card, but I was scared. I'm a coward... I only got here by pulling some strings, and I was afraid they'd retaliate against me at school, so I had no choice but to agree..."

"Hm. So because you're a coward, you had to agree. And then you took their money and got a room for yourself? That's a pretty good reason... Tang Weiwei, is that what happened?" Qin Tianxiong nodded, looking at Tang Weiwei again.

"I... I... Lieutenant Qin, you have to believe me! It was him! He went into Major Shen's room first last night! He was on her bed! We even fought, and he kicked me! Right, Ah Si?" Tang Weiwei tried to lift the bandages on his head to show them, but they wouldn't budge.

"Yes! And he slapped me!" Ah Si chimed in immediately.

"Nonsense!" Qin Tianxiong slammed his hand on the table, his presence suddenly immense. "You two filled Major Shen's room with knockout gas! If Gao Neng had been inside, he would have been knocked out too! So how could a gassed Gao Neng possibly beat the two of you? Gao Neng, isn't that right!!!"

"I... I don't understand. What are you talking about? Knockout gas?" Gao Neng blinked again.

'He's trying to trap me!'

He wasn't falling for it.

The corner of Qin Tianxiong's mouth twitched. He gave Gao Neng a long, hard look, then broke into laughter. "Hahaha... It seems you really are clueless. However, I recall you were staying in the room right next to Major Shen. There was a huge commotion. Are you telling me you were completely oblivious? Gao Neng, you're lying!"

"..." Gao Neng was speechless.

"Gao Neng, you think you're clever, trying to deny everything, but you're wrong. Your story is full of holes. If you confess now, I can still try to get you a lighter sentence. But if you continue this nonsense, you know the consequences. The Military Department has ways of making you understand the meaning of 'a fate worse than death'!" Qin Tianxiong's gaze was glacial.

Stared down by Qin Tianxiong, Gao Neng grimaced internally. 'This is unavoidable.' This Qin Tianxiong was in a completely different league, intellectually, than Tang Weiwei and his cronies.

No matter what he said, Qin Tianxiong would find a way to pin the blame on him.

Gritting his teeth, he had no choice but to change tactics. He began to tremble and back away as he spoke. "I am lying, but... but aren't you lying too, Lieutenant Qin?"

"Oh? You say I'm lying? What lie might that be?" Qin Tianxiong watched Gao Neng with great interest.

"You're trying to... help Tang Weiwei get off the hook, aren't you?"

"Hm?!"

"If not, then why are you so fixated on me, an innocent person? Is it really because... I rented a room in the hotel? Or is it because... you actually have some kind of deal with Principal Tang, and you plan on making me the scapegoat?"

"You little brat, how dare you spout such nonsense!" Qin Tianxiong's fists clenched.

"I lied, yes! Because I've already figured it out... Major Shen is Shen Ning'Er, right? I did hear the commotion last night, but I was already checking out in the hotel lobby by then. You can check the time! Wait, stay back... You're not going to kill me to silence me, are you?!" At the end of his tirade, Gao Neng seemed to sense Qin Tianxiong's rage and rapidly backed away.

"Kill you to silence you? I'm a dignified..."

"AH! MURDER! HE'S SILENCING A WITNESS! SOMEONE!" Gao Neng ignored Qin Tianxiong and just started screaming.

"Kid, shut your mouth! What are you shouting for?!"

"AHH... I've exposed your conspiracy, and now you want to kill me! HELP!"

"If you don't shut up, I'll..."

"BANG!"

The door was violently thrown open.

Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan burst into the room.

"Qin Tianxiong! As a lieutenant of the Military Department, you promised you wouldn't torture Gao Neng! Why did you go back on your word?" Li Qingping had clearly heard the commotion from outside the door and looked furious.

"THUD!"

Just then, Gao Neng suddenly tripped over a chair and fell headfirst to the ground. He scrambled back up quickly, but he seemed to be in a daze.

"Gao Neng, what's wrong? Are you okay?" Zhang Dafan asked, moving to help him.

But Gao Neng immediately jumped away.

TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK!

Remaining Time: 03:13

Gao Neng glanced at the remaining time. Then, swaying unsteadily, he began to perform a set of calisthenics, a look of pure joy on his face.

He knew his acting was perhaps a little over-the-top, with plenty of room for improvement. But time was short, and even with his top-student intellect, he couldn't come up with a better plan.

His only saving grace was that both Qin Tianxiong and Shen Ning'Er were members of the Military Department.

Without concrete evidence, they couldn't do anything to him for the time being, no matter how suspicious they were. Once he got into the Military University and gained some power and status, perhaps then he could truly protect himself.

'To complete the quest.'

'I'll go all out!'

"Hahaha... You all just want to frame me... My life is worthless anyway! You just want me to confess, right? Fine... I confess! I'm the true culprit who did in Shen Ning'Er! What can you do to me?! Hahaha... What can you do to me?!"

"Ding. Prompt: Voice not loud enough. Please shout loudly: I'm the true culprit who did in Shen Ning'Er! What can you do to me!"

Remaining Time: 02:45.

Chapter 22: Eye of Deprivation

"This kid... confessed?" Qin Tianxiong was stunned. He had gone to great lengths just to implicate Gao Neng as an accomplice of Tang Weiwei and Ah Si, but he never imagined Gao Neng would actually confess voluntarily.

'Has he gone insane?'

A question inexplicably popped into Qin Tianxiong's mind.

It wasn't just him. The moment Zhang Dafan saw the scene, he immediately recalled Gao Neng doing calisthenics on the bus.

'The pressure must have been too much!'

'His fragile mind... finally cracked?'

'He's lost it, he's lost it, Gao Neng has really lost his mind!'

And in fact, Gao Neng was acting a little "crazy" right now. 'And the system calls this not loud enough? If I had a megaphone, the entire hotel would be able to hear me!'

'Can't be helped!'

'System, you're something else!'

Gao Neng took a deep breath, mustering his strength.

"Hahaha, I'm the one who took down Shen Ning'Er! What are you going to do about it? Hahaha... What are you going to do... Mmph!!!" Gao Neng couldn't shout the rest.

Because he had been tackled by Zhang Dafan.

As Gao Neng shouted and performed his calisthenics, his homeroom teacher, Zhang Dafan, was suddenly filled with incredible valor, as if divinely inspired.

He tackled Gao Neng, pinning him to the ground.

Gao Neng felt his entire body pinned firmly under Zhang Dafan, his mouth completely covered. He subconsciously wanted to use all his strength to throw Zhang Dafan off, but he felt that wouldn't be appropriate.

"Haha... Gao Neng's lost it! Hahaha... he's lost his mind!" Tang Weiwei finally reacted. But as soon as the words left his mouth, he felt something wasn't quite right.

'Wait a minute!'

'He's not crazy!'

'He's the one who did it! He's just telling the truth!'

"He confessed! Hurry up and arrest him! Let the two of us go!" Having come to his senses, Tang Weiwei started yelling too.

Gao Neng, however, paid him no mind.

A series of mechanical sounds was ringing in his mind.

"Ding! Congratulations, Host, for completing the side quest: 'Confront!'"

"Commencing random reward."

"Spinning, spinning, I'm spinning..."

"Ding! Congratulations, Host. You have randomly obtained 'Eye of Deprivation' (Trial Version: 5-day trial period)."

"The Eye of Deprivation can strip away one of the Four Great Ancient Evil Arts, the 'Makeup Technique,' as well as all other forms of disguise. Before you, the Makeup Technique and all disguises are rendered useless. You possess the power to see through the essence of all things."

'Isn't this supposed to be a Transformer? What the hell is an Eye of Deprivation?! And it's a damn trial version? What kind of random reward is this? Are you messing with me?' Gao Neng was stunned. He'd risked life and limb to complete this stupid side quest, only to get a trial version of the "Eye of Deprivation."

'I can't take this. I would've rather gotten a Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill!'

"No mistake! Surprised? Bet you didn't expect that!" the mechanical voice replied.

"..." Gao Neng was speechless.

'I don't want to curse. I'm a man of culture. I just want to compose another poem.' But after a moment's thought, he realized he didn't have the poetic mood or inspiration right now.

Then, he asked a question he swore he would never ask again for the rest of his life.

"So... how do I upgrade this trial version to the full version?"

"Pay up! How do you expect to get the full version if you don't spend money?"

"..."

...

「Golden Grand Hotel, Surveillance Room」

"Has he lost his mind?" Dressed in a black military uniform, Shen Ning'Er sat quietly on the sofa, watching the surveillance feed. She tucked a stray strand of long hair behind her ear. "Lieutenant Chen."

"Ma'am!" The soldier standing beside Shen Ning'Er nodded immediately.

"We brought a field medic with us this time, didn't we?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Can he diagnose psychiatric issues?"

"Doctor Wang is a veteran medic with extensive experience. He previously worked in psychiatric rehabilitation at the Third Hospital. I believe he is more than qualified."

"Then have Doctor Wang pay them a visit. Make sure all three of them are evaluated. It will demonstrate the Military Department's impartiality." A faint, unreadable smile touched Shen Ning'er's lips, as beautiful and sudden as a peach blossom blooming in March on her otherwise placid face.

"Understood." Lieutenant Chen nodded and turned to leave the room.

...

「In the conference room.」

Gao Neng was still pinned down by Zhang Dafan.

Meanwhile, Li Qingping and Qin Tianxiong were locked in a heated argument.

Li Qingping insisted on taking Gao Neng to the hospital to have his injuries treated first, but Qin Tianxiong refused, declaring that he hadn't laid a finger on the boy.

The two argued back and forth.

Tang Weiwei and Ah Si looked at Gao Neng, sneering inwardly.

'Crazy or not, you've already confessed. There's no escaping this time, hehe...'
Tang Weiwei's head was still throbbing, but he wanted to laugh. It was just difficult to form a grin.

Ah Si stood behind Tang Weiwei. He could already sense Captain Qin's favoritism. 'It's true what they say,' he thought, 'it's good to have friends in high places.' That principle had held true throughout history.

Tang De had also entered the room by now.

However, he was far calmer than Li Qingping and Qin Tianxiong. Without even sparing Tang Weiwei a glance, he simply stood to the side, observing coolly.

"Qin Tianxiong, as a principal, I must be responsible for my student's safety!" Li Qingping was furious. He'd been gone for less than twenty minutes, and this had happened. Furthermore, Gao Neng was clearly not in a good state; it was highly likely he'd had a mental breakdown under the pressure.

"Principal Li, you are obstructing a Military Department investigation. I have already told you clearly that I did not lay a hand on Gao Neng. If you don't believe me, you can go to the surveillance room and check the footage yourself!"

"And if I go, you'll just take Gao Neng away, won't you?"

"Principal Li, have faith in the Military Department!"

"It's precisely because I trusted the Military Department too much that I allowed you to drive Gao Neng insane!"

"Principal Li, this behavior of yours..."

"..."

"Captain!" Just then, Lieutenant Chen walked in, dressed in his black military uniform. A slightly heavysset, middle-aged man followed behind him.

"Lieutenant Chen? Doctor Wang? You're here... to...?" Qin Tianxiong knew who Lieutenant Chen reported to. His appearance now meant he was surely carrying orders.

"To perform a psychiatric evaluation on Gao Neng," Lieutenant Chen said, gesturing to Doctor Wang behind him.

"Hello, Captain Qin," Doctor Wang said with a smile.

"Hello, Doctor Wang." Qin Tianxiong nodded, then his eyes lit with understanding. "I see. In that case, please conduct a thorough examination, Doctor Wang. Let's see if this kid has really lost his mind."

"Yes, and I'll ask you two to participate as well." Doctor Wang smiled again, his gaze shifting to Tang Weiwei and Ah Si.

"Why do we have to be examined too?" Tang Weiwei was baffled.

"That's right... We're not the crazy ones, Gao Neng is! Just examine him. What's the point of examining us?" Ah Si was equally perplexed.

Doctor Wang didn't reply, merely turning his head to look at Lieutenant Chen.

"Ahem. The thing is, both of you sustained head injuries yesterday. With injuries of that nature, it's possible to experience certain hallucinations. Therefore, to verify the credibility of your statements, we need you both to cooperate with a psychiatric evaluation," Lieutenant Chen explained, having understood the unspoken request.

"We refuse to be examined! There's nothing wrong with us! We saw everything clearly yesterday. Gao Neng did it, and he even confessed. There's no mistake!" Although his head had been smashed, Tang Weiwei wasn't a complete idiot. He had no desire to be labeled a lunatic like Gao Neng.

"Whether there's a problem with your mental state isn't for you to decide. It's for Doctor Wang to decide." Lieutenant Chen's gaze on Tang Weiwei grew cold. "This is a decision from the Military Department. Are you trying to defy it?"

"..." Tang Weiwei glanced at Ah Si, then over at Tang De, who stood motionless nearby. His lips parted as if to say something.

"Since it's the Military Department's decision, you will naturally cooperate." Tang De shot Tang Weiwei a meaningful look before turning to Doctor Wang with a smile. "Please, Doctor Wang, go ahead and examine all of them."

"Mm, rest assured, Principal Tang. And you too, Principal Li and Captain Qin. Since I, Wang ChaCha, began overseeing rehabilitation training in the psychiatric ward, I've seen at least eight hundred patients, if not a thousand. I've never

misdiagnosed a single one. Countless people have claimed they had no psychiatric issues, but I, Wang ChaCha, saw right through them with a single glance. Not one has ever gotten away!" Doctor Wang ChaCha puffed out his chest, his face a mask of absolute confidence.

Chapter 23: You Are All Psychos

"Not a single one will escape?"

"..."

The soldiers, Li Qingping, and the others all felt a sudden chill. For some reason, the conference room suddenly felt a bit cold.

"Um... what does this examination entail?" Li Qingping glanced at Gao Neng, pinned firmly to the floor, thought for a moment, and decided to ask.

"It's very simple. I'll ask a question. As long as they can answer it, they don't have any mental problems. If they can't, then they definitely have mental problems," Wang ChaCha explained with a smile.

"Just one question?" Li Qingping asked, a little surprised.

"Is Principal Li questioning me, Wang ChaCha?" Wang ChaCha's brow furrowed in displeasure. "I may spend most of my time performing surgery at the military hospital, but I have a senior colleague who has been a doctor in a psychiatric hospital for over forty years!"

"Doctor Wang, you misunderstand. That's not what I meant..." Li Qingping, feeling he might have been overly suspicious, hurriedly explained.

"There's no misunderstanding. This is what you call professionalism!" Wang ChaCha cut Li Qingping off and continued, "From a professional standpoint, 30% of the people in this world are mentally ill. The only difference is the severity. However, as mentally ill people, they all share two common traits. There's no escaping that!"

"Oh? Please elaborate, Doctor Wang!" Li Qingping's eyes lit up slightly.

"First, they will never admit they are mentally ill. Second, they will think everyone else is mentally ill!" Wang ChaCha said with conviction.

"Hmm... that makes sense. In my time, I've also met some mentally ill patients. They never admit it, and they do indeed think others are the crazy ones. It seems Doctor Wang is truly a professional." Lieutenant Chen immediately chimed in. He then looked around and added, "We lack a controlled medical environment here, so it's indeed difficult to test a person's brain. In that case, please begin, Doctor Wang."

Li Qingping looked at Wang ChaCha, then at the conference room's environment. He wanted to ask something more, but ultimately kept quiet, merely waving a hand at Zhang Dafan.

"Release Gao Neng. Let him answer the question."

"Okay, sure... Gao Neng, are you all right?" Although Zhang Dafan was still a little worried, he figured if Gao Neng really did have a mental problem, then early treatment would certainly be a good thing.

"A moment ago, it felt like a rock was crushing my chest, and my head was spinning. I'm much better now..." Gao Neng replied as soon as his mouth was freed.

"Oh, that's good. Doctor Wang is a medic from the Military Department. He's going to conduct a psychological test on you now. You have to answer his questions properly, understand?"

"Understood," Gao Neng nodded.

"Then please begin the test, Doctor Wang." Seeing that Gao Neng could indeed answer his questions clearly, Zhang Dafan finally breathed a sigh of relief.

'Looks like he's recovered, right?'

...

Gao Neng was released.

He didn't continue to act crazy...

Because a thought had suddenly struck him. 'If I'm really diagnosed as mentally ill, perhaps that could be a way to escape, right?'

'But if that happens, won't I be locked up in a psychiatric hospital?'

That led to another problem...

'How would I escape from a psychiatric hospital?'

He still had a mission with only a three-day time limit, and half a day was already gone. 'Time is really tight.'

'No, I can't be diagnosed as mentally ill.'

'But if I'm not mentally ill, won't what I shouted earlier—"I'm the real culprit who did in Shen Ning'Er, what can you do to me!"—be taken as the truth?'

'What a dilemma!'

'Right, I could pretend to have intermittent psychological breakdowns. I could even feign complete amnesia about that moment. I just wonder if anyone would believe me?' Gao Neng made up his mind.

Seeing that Gao Neng, Tang Weiwei, and Ah Si had no objections, Wang ChaCha called the three of them over and had them stand in a line.

"I'm going to ask you one question. All three of you can answer, understand?" Wang ChaCha put on a kind and amiable expression.

"Mhm," Gao Neng nodded.

"..." Tang Weiwei and Ah Si glanced at each other, then also nodded.

"Good. My question is very simple. Imagine the three of you are being hunted by an Assassin. You escape into a bathroom, where you find a bathtub full of water. The only escape route is underneath the bathtub, but time is extremely tight. You can only access the escape route by completely emptying the tub."

"..." Tang Weiwei and Ah Si listened to Wang ChaCha's question, their faces tense.

"Alright, here's the actual question. Beside the tub, there's a basin and a spoon. You must make the correct choice. That's it. So, you three, who wants to answer first?" Wang ChaCha said with a smile, looking at them.

"I'll go first! I choose the basin!" Tang Weiwei immediately piped up. 'Isn't this question a little too simple? Anyone who isn't a complete idiot knows a basin is bigger than a spoon.'

"Is that your final answer?" Wang ChaCha's eyes narrowed.

"Yes, that's my final answer," Tang Weiwei said with certainty.

"Diagnosis: you are mentally ill!" Wang ChaCha's friendly tone suddenly changed. He looked extremely excited, like a predator that had just spotted its prey.

"..."

Everyone in the room was stunned for a moment.

Tang Weiwei, in particular, was dumbfounded for a good five or six seconds before he came to his senses.

"NO!!! I'm not mentally ill! I'm not mentally ill! You quack! Who sent you? Dad, save me! Quick, tell them I'm not mentally ill!" Tang Weiwei screamed.

"You see? The symptoms are showing. Every mentally ill person will deny that they're mentally ill. Wasn't I right?" Wang ChaCha looked around, a smug "I told you so" expression on his face.

"..." Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan exchanged a look.

"..." Qin Tianxiong and Lieutenant Chen exchanged a look.

Both pairs chose to remain silent.

"Alright, next. Which of you two will answer?" Unfazed by their silence, Wang ChaCha's gaze shifted to Ah Si and Gao Neng.

"Me! I'll answer! I choose... the spoon?" Ah Si nervously cut in, then hesitated for a moment before giving his answer.

"Are you sure?" Wang ChaCha's eyes narrowed again.

"Y-Yes, I'm sure!" Ah Si took a deep breath and affirmed his choice.

"Diagnosis: you are mentally ill!" Wang ChaCha's expression shifted once more. He seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the thrill of finding his prey. If Qin Tianxiong, Lieutenant Chen, Li Qingping, and the others hadn't been there, no one would have doubted that Wang ChaCha might break into a celebratory dance.

"NO!!! I'm not mentally ill! You just said the person who chose the basin was mentally ill, and now you're saying the person who chose the spoon is mentally ill too! You're the one who's mentally ill! You're the mentally ill one!" Ah Si immediately retorted furiously.

"Hahaha, I was right again! The second trait of the mentally ill: they won't admit they're ill, and they'll call others ill instead. Am I right or am I right?" Wang ChaCha grew even more excited. Having found two mentally ill people at once, he increasingly felt that he had a truly discerning eye.

Chapter 24: Your Show or Mine?

"..."

Li Qingping glanced at Zhang Dafan.

Qin Tianxiong glanced at Lieutenant Chen.

For some unknown reason, a chill ran down all four of their spines. They had a feeling... that they might be insane, too.

'This, this is what a *real* lunatic is like, isn't it?'

Gao Neng was also a bit speechless at this point. 'So much for the old, experienced military doctor,' he thought. 'This Wang ChaCha seems perfectly amicable, but isn't he a little... unreliable?'

'He could play this game too.'

'Just arrest everyone, and you won't miss a single one, right?'

"You're the only one left, Gao Neng. Do you choose the basin or the ladle?" Wang ChaCha asked, seemingly oblivious to everyone's expressions as he suppressed his excitement.

"I choose neither," Gao Neng replied with a smile.

'He wasn't an idiot.'

'The precedents were clear. No matter what he chose, he'd be diagnosed as insane, right?'

"Oh? Then what do you plan to do? I should remind you, there's nothing in the bathroom besides the basin and the ladle. You can't pull a Sima Guang and smash the vat. Besides, the bathtub is cemented in place. Moving it is even more impossible," Wang ChaCha said with a sly, squinty-eyed grin.

"..." Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan couldn't bear to watch any longer. 'This is a dead end, isn't it? How can he possibly win this?'

Just as they were about to speak, Gao Neng's voice rang out.

"I choose to pull the drain plug."

"..."

"The plug?!"

"That's right! To drain the water, you just pull the plug! Why didn't I think of that? It's way faster than using a basin or anything!"

Hearing Gao Neng's words, Li Qingping and the others were jolted into realization.

"Pull the plug? Are you sure?" Wang ChaCha also seemed a little surprised.

"I'm sure," Gao Neng nodded.

"Excellent! The diagnosis is in: you are completely sane! In such an urgent situation, the fastest way to drain the bathtub is, of course, to pull the plug. Only a lunatic would choose to use a basin and a ladle. Don't you all agree?" Wang ChaCha smiled and patted Gao Neng lightly on the shoulder, then glanced around at the others.

"..." The surroundings fell silent.

"What, does anyone have a different opinion?" Wang ChaCha continued when no one spoke.

"Not at all, not at all... Doctor Wang, you truly are a professional!" Lieutenant Chen finally reacted, becoming the first to support Wang ChaCha's decision.

"Yes, Doctor Wang is indeed very professional!" Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan exchanged a glance, and both finally let out a sigh of relief.

But Tang Weiwei and Ah Si were dumbfounded.

'Pull the plug!'

'They knew that too, for fuck's sake!'

"NO!!! This isn't fair! You quack... You never said pulling the plug was an option! I'm not insane! I'm not insane! Dad, save me!" Tang Weiwei screamed.

'He, a perfectly normal person, had been diagnosed as insane?'

'And Gao Neng, a maniac who was obviously the "insane" one, was diagnosed as normal?'

'He refused to accept it!'

SLAP!

A sharp slap landed across Tang Weiwei's face.

"You **are** insane! Do you understand?! You are insane!" Tang De's slap was incredibly forceful, sending Tang Weiwei tumbling to the ground.

THUD!

Tang Weiwei collapsed, his face covered in blood.

He stared blankly at Tang De.

Tears began to stream down his face, unstoppable.

"I'm not insane... No, I'm not insane... Am I insane? No... I'm not... I am insane? Wait, am I insane?" Tang Weiwei mumbled, his expression growing more vacant, as if he could no longer hear anything else.

Tang De bit his lip.

His fists were clenched so tightly his knuckles turned white, making a continuous CRACKLING sound.

"Lieutenant Qin, now that my son has been diagnosed as insane, I wonder what the procedure is now?" Tang De's amiable smile was gone, replaced by a cold, sinister gaze.

"He will first be taken to a Military Department hospital for supervised treatment. After his condition is cured, he will then face a Military Department trial!" Qin Tianxiong frowned before finally speaking.

"Then I shall trouble Lieutenant Qin!" Tang De nodded, then turned his gaze to Gao Neng. "So, what will be done with Gao Neng? Now that his sanity has been confirmed, he did just admit that he was the one who..."

BUZZ, BUZZ BUZZ!

Just then, a vibrating sound came from Lieutenant Chen.

Lieutenant Chen glanced down, immediately pulled a black, military-issue phone from his waist, and answered it.

"Yes... Understood... Okay!"

After speaking, Lieutenant Chen hung up and gave Gao Neng a long, deep look. "Gao Neng, you can go. However, there are still some suspicious points in this matter, and we need you to be available for questioning at any time. Take this phone with you and keep it on 24 hours a day. Understand?"

"Huh? Okay... Understood," Gao Neng nodded.

Meanwhile, Qin Tianxiong, Li Qingping, and Zhang Dafan were a bit stunned.

"Go?!"

It wasn't just them. Tang De's expression was also incredibly ugly. He swallowed the words that were on the tip of his tongue. His jaw was clenched and his chest heaved, but soon, an artificial smile was plastered back on his face.

"Ah, Gao Neng, you see? The Military Department is just. I've said it all along: as long as you didn't do it, you just need to explain things clearly. By the way, with your grades, I believe you can definitely get into the Military University in the City of Hope in this year's college entrance exams. You might even get into one of the Four Great Academies! That would truly bring glory to our Forgotten Land. Keep up the good work, and don't disappoint the school, understand?" Tang De's smile was utterly sincere.

"Understood!" Gao Neng replied with equal sincerity.

However, he paid no mind to Tang De's talk about the Four Great Academies.

'The Four Great Academies? Yeah, right...'

'That's where the true chosen ones go.'

'Someone like him, who had lived in the Forgotten Land for eighteen years, had no resources and no money. His starting point was leagues behind those chosen ones. Just getting into the lowest-ranked Military University would be a blessing from Lady Luck.'

In fact, his dream had always been very simple.

'Any Military University would do, even the lowest-ranked one. He might be at the bottom of the class when he first got in, but who could say if that would still be the case three or four years later?'

However, he had now broken through his first human limit.

'Although that damn system was completely unreliable, the fact was that his strength had indeed increased over the past two days.'

'So, he couldn't help but feel a little puffed up. He decided to challenge himself and try for a lower-middle-tier Military University.'

Of course, the most pressing matter now was still earning the one thousand registration fee.

Otherwise, all he could do was lament what could have been.

'I'll go to the Dream Toy Factory tonight!' Gao Neng was no fool. He had already guessed that the call just now was very likely from Shen Ning'Er.

'Let him go?'

'Impossible.'

'Otherwise, why would they "give" him a phone as he left? There was definitely something fishy about Shen Ning'Er's sudden decision.'

'The 10% of the one hundred thousand Alliance Coins and the beginner's treasure chest—he had to get his hands on them as soon as possible. Only by increasing his strength could he truly protect himself.'

...

In the monitoring room.

Shen Ning'Er sat alone on the sofa, a pen in her hand. After a moment of hesitation, she wrote down a piece of data on a white sheet of paper:
Appearance...

points (Perfect).

After writing down "100 points (Perfect)," she continued: Acting: 50 points (Exaggerated), IQ: 60 points (Passable), Combat Power... 2 points (Imbecile).

After finishing this, Shen Ning'Er wrote another line in the corresponding column below. Appearance: 100 points (Perfect). This time, she didn't hesitate at all. Then, she quickly wrote out the rest.

Acting: 99 points (Indistinguishable from reality), IQ: 99 points (Superb), Combat Power: 99 points (Unrivaled... among his peers!)

After all the data was written...

Shen Ning'Er stared at the words on the paper and began to ponder.

'These stats completely crush mine, so why did I faint? Could I really have been dreaming...? Yes... it was a dream. It must have been a dream!' Shen Ning'Er muttered to herself, her gaze drifting toward the mirror beside her. 'You little siren, you're still so beautiful... Wait a minute. To find out if it was a dream or not, all I have to do is test him, right?'

As if struck by an idea, Shen Ning'Er pulled out a makeup kit, took out a brush, and began to apply it to her face.

Soon, Shen Ning'Er's appearance changed.

The corners of her eyes were lifted, making her look extremely bewitching. But the distance between her eyes seemed to widen, and her nose appeared larger. She was basically a different person.

"Perfect! There's no way that guy will recognize me now, right?" Shen Ning'Er's lips curled into a bewitching smile. Feeling it still wasn't enough, she used her brush to dot a few freckles on her face. "Hmph, tonight I'll let you see what real acting is, and what a superb IQ looks like!"

(Please vote for this story! La la la!)

Chapter 25: North Suburban Mental Hospital

...

After the morning's events, Li Qingping and Zhang Dafan naturally didn't insist on Gao Neng going to school. They both suggested he go home and rest for the day.

Gao Neng thought about it for a moment and didn't refuse.

After all, the theoretical courses for his senior year were already finished. The rest of the time was mostly for review. As a top student, he was never worried about his academic scores.

As for practical combat...

His physical fitness had doubled, and he had even broken through the first human limit. Barring any surprises, securing a spot in the top five among the high schools in the Forgotten Land wouldn't be a problem.

The main problem right now was still money!

As the saying goes, a problem that can be solved with money isn't really a problem. The key issue, however... was that he had no money!

Gao Neng had already decided to go "farm for cash" at the Dream Toy Factory tonight. It was always a good idea to spend the remaining time making thorough preparations.

"Gao Neng, your home isn't too far from the school, and we're both heading back. Why don't you ride with me and Teacher Zhang?" Li Qingping had a car—not a great one, but not a jalopy either.

"Thank you, Principal, but I'll be fine walking back on my own." Gao Neng shook his head. He had already brought everything he could prepare from home when he left. He needed to get the other things while he was out.

"Alright then, be careful." Li Qingping didn't insist. Watching Gao Neng's departing figure, he let out a soft sigh. "Sigh... If our Third Senior High School had a few more students like Gao Neng, we wouldn't be so thoroughly crushed by First High School that we can't even hold our heads up."

"Indeed," Zhang Dafan nodded.

The scoring standard for the college entrance exam was 30% theory and 70% practical combat.

In their minds, although Gao Neng's practical combat scores were average, his theory scores were more than good enough. He had at least a thirty percent chance of getting into the lowest-ranked Military University in the City of Hope. For this reason, Gao Neng had always been one of the students Third Senior High School focused on cultivating.

It was just that diligent, intelligent, and well-behaved students like Gao Neng were becoming rarer and rarer. The corrupting influence of the Forgotten Land was too severe to be changed in a short time.

Sighing again, Li Qingping drove away with Zhang Dafan.

...

「Inside the Golden Grand Hotel.」

Shen Ning'Er had already returned to her room. She had moved to a room on the 9th floor, and through the window, she could clearly see Gao Neng leaving alone.

However, she had no intention of following him immediately.

Because in her hand, she was holding a small tracking screen that emitted a faint glow. On it, a small red dot was moving slowly.

'I wonder if he can find the tracker in his phone?' Shen Ning'Er pondered for a moment, then felt she was overthinking it. 'How could an ordinary high school student possibly think about a tracker being installed in his phone?' Shaking her head, a smile crept onto her lips. 'Now then... how should I test him?'

...

"Achoo!"

Walking down the street, Gao Neng suddenly shivered. 'Is someone plotting against Us?'

After a moment's thought, he shook his head again. Gao Neng had never believed in feudal superstitions about ghosts and monsters.

'If they do exist, then let's fight for three hundred rounds!'

...

Time passed quickly, and in a flash, it was night.

The Forgotten Land welcomed its daily darkness. All sorts of people and affairs began to stir. On the red-lit streets and in the music-thumping Underworld, the gray zones never lacked for unbridled indulgence.

"Come on, handsome... Come have some fun!" Seductive eyes shimmered with desire, and a waist swaying like a water snake stirred one's lust, making it hard to walk away.

"Got any shredded dudes with eight-pack abs, weighing around two hundred pounds?" Gao Neng asked with a deadpan expression.

"..." Silence.

"None? How boring!" Gao Neng shouldered his large black backpack, which was half as tall as he was, and strode away, leaving two worldly figures disheveled in the wind.

In the span of a few hours, Gao Neng had finished preparing everything he could. He also brought some rations to eat in case he got hungry at night.

He checked the time: 9:03 PM. There were still nearly five hours until the mission's indicated time of 2:00 AM. He planned to head over early to scout the area.

The Dream Toy Factory was located in the North Suburb of the Forgotten Land.

It was over 40 kilometers from Gao Neng's current location.

If he walked, it would probably take until the next morning. So, after careful consideration, Gao Neng decided to bite the bullet and hail a cab.

'This hurts!'

'I haven't even earned a single Alliance Coin, and I'm already shelling out a dozen or so for a taxi!'

Gao Neng's heart ached so much he could barely breathe.

However, when he thought about how this trip could potentially net him an easy ten thousand Alliance Coins, his mood finally improved. 'One can't be too stingy. Sometimes you have to be generous.'

"To the North Suburban Mental Hospital." Because of what had happened today, Gao Neng was becoming more cautious. He didn't have the driver take him directly to the Dream Toy Factory. Instead, he chose a mental hospital near the factory as his destination to avoid leaving any clues.

"Twenty-five Alliance Coins," the driver said, quoting an exorbitant price.

"Fifteen."

"You can walk there yourself."

"Sixteen."

"..."

"Seventeen. Can't go any higher."

"Twenty, minimum!"

"Eighteen. I'll add one more. If you don't take it, I'll find another car."

"Fine, fine, forget it. Get in." The driver nodded, gesturing for Gao Neng to get in the car.

Gao Neng didn't stand on ceremony. He squeezed into the passenger seat with his large black backpack, then placed the big black bag in front of him and hugged it with both hands.

"Little brother, heading to the mental hospital so late with such a big bag? Visiting a patient?" the driver asked curiously as he started the car.

"Nope, I'm going sightseeing," Gao Neng shook his head.

"Sightseeing?" The driver was baffled. "As far as I know, the North Suburb is a desolate wasteland. Besides the mental hospital you're going to, there's just an abandoned factory. Where exactly are you going sightseeing, little brother?"

"I'm sightseeing *at* the mental hospital!"

"..." The driver glanced at Gao Neng again and, for some reason, saw him break into a wide grin, revealing a mouthful of pearly white teeth.

HISS!

The driver's mind went blank, buzzing as if it were about to explode.

He focused on driving and didn't say another word.

Gao Neng, enjoying the peace and quiet, closed his eyes to rest. He actually wanted to do some calisthenics, but unfortunately, the car didn't have a sunroof, so he couldn't perform the movements.

However, while his mind was on calisthenics and his body couldn't move, his mouth was very honest.

Before he knew it...

a rhythmic chant began to mutter from Gao Neng's lips.

"One, two, three, four... two, two, three, four... three, two, three, four... four, two, three, four... one more time..."

"..."

The driver's face grew paler and paler, and the car sped up continuously. A trip that should have taken an hour was forcefully completed in just forty minutes.

"Little brother, I can see you have an extraordinary air about you. You must be a dragon among men. I'd like to form a good connection today. For the eighteen-Alliance Coin fare, I'll just charge you fifteen," the driver said with a benevolent expression.

"Thanks, uncle." Gao Neng hadn't expected such good fortune and was very happy. He reached into his pocket, but his large black bag was too big, making it difficult to move.

CLANG!

A soft sound rang out.

A hammer had fallen to the floor.

"!!!" The driver's eyes went wide.

"Oh, this is for road repair. I saw a rock jutting out at the entrance of the mental hospital and was afraid someone might trip. I plan to use this hammer to flatten it," Gao Neng explained casually, noticing the driver's expression.

"Oh..." The driver nodded, his face pale.

CLANG!

Another soft sound rang out.

A wrench successfully fell out.

"This... is also for road repair?!" One of the driver's hands was on the door handle, while the other fumbled nervously behind his back. He felt around and around, but found nothing.

"Yep. If the hammer can't flatten it, I'll use the wrench to pry it up," Gao Neng nodded, then continued to search his pockets for money.

"Little brother, it's a bit cramped in the car. You... you can actually get out first and then pay." Sweat beaded on the driver's forehead. Unable to find what he was looking for, his legs began to tremble.

"Oh, you're right, uncle. I'll get out first then." Gao Neng came to a realization. He picked up the hammer and wrench, then pushed the door open and got out.

SLAM!

The moment he stepped out, the car door slammed shut.

Before Gao Neng could react, the driver had already sped off.

"Uncle, your fare!"

"..."

There was no reply.

Gao Neng was a little speechless. 'What just happened? Could it be that the driver uncle is a good person? Right, he did say something about forming a good connection. He really is a Buddhist-minded driver.'

He'd saved eighteen Alliance Coins.

Gao Neng was in a pretty good mood. However, he didn't notice a black steel motorcycle parked in the shadows on the roadside behind him.

A girl with upturned eyes sat on the motorcycle.

"The North Suburban Mental Hospital?" The girl glanced at the eerie, old building not far away, the corners of her mouth twitching into a slight smile. 'Could it be fate, wanting me to pretend to be a mental patient too? Alright, if that's the case, then let me show you what a textbook-level psycho looks like!'

Chapter 26: One Comes, One Gets Smashed

...

In the Forgotten Land, inside a renovated old villa.

Tang De was on edge.

For some reason, he had a nagging feeling that the plan was about to go wrong. But no matter how many times he went over it in his head, he couldn't pinpoint the problem.

"Wei'Er might be in trouble, but that thing shouldn't be in Qin Tianxiong's hands yet. Otherwise, he wouldn't be coming to me for it! But if he doesn't have it, why hasn't he pressed me for it after a whole day has passed? What the hell, is he expecting me to just deliver it to his doorstep?" Tang De shook his head.

No!

I can't deliver it myself!

Tang De shook his head again, picked up a glass full of red wine, and downed it in one gulp.

RING RING RING!

Just then, the phone rang.

"Qin Tianxiong!" Tang De's eyes lit up. He took a deep breath and answered the call. "Lieutenant Qin, can you give me an explanation for what happened today?"

"It was outside my control. That's your explanation," Qin Tianxiong said bluntly.

"That's a pretty meaningless thing to say, Lieutenant Qin. If your capabilities are so limited, what's the point of me cooperating with you? Does this mean I can start looking for a new partner?" Tang De sat down, trying his best to remain calm.

"You mean Shen Ning'Er?"

"And why not?"

"Heh... Tang De, I suggest you get one thing straight. Some things can't be brought out into the open. Not everyone in the Alliance supports seeking cooperation. On the surface, it looks like Shen Ning'Er came to the Forgotten Land to assist me with my mission, but I suspect she might belong to the other faction."

"What do you mean?"

"Although she didn't say it outright, I can tell you that I tested her once to see if she was interested in contacting you people. She refused."

"Refused? Heh, don't try to scare me, brother. Are you saying the Alliance isn't here to reorganize things, but to purge us? Given the Alliance's current situation, do they even have the energy to manage the Forgotten Land?"

"Believe it or not, Shen Ning'Er really has no intention of immediately contacting you three major powers. Moreover, she came prepared. She has files on all three of your factions. I've seen them. They're extremely detailed. Besides that one thing you mentioned, they have basically everything else. So, if you really want to stay in the Forgotten Land, your best choice is to give me the item as soon as possible and earn some merit!"

"How can I trust you?"

"Believe it or not, that's all I have to say!"

BEEP. BEEP BEEP...

The call ended.

Tang De stared at the phone in his hand, a little dumbfounded.

'What the hell?!'

'Is this how you ask for a favor?'

'Would it kill you to beg me one more time?'

'If you just begged me one more time, I would've given it to you, damn it!'

'Fuck!'

Tang De was frustrated. He almost called back, but ultimately stopped himself. He really did want to cooperate with the Alliance because that old man, Wang Ju, already had a "backing force." If nothing unexpected happened, they would be making a move soon. But if the Alliance's terms were too poor, the cooperation would be meaningless.

'Patience. Just a little more patience... Three days at most. No, two days! Qin Tianxiong will definitely come back begging!' Tang De took a few deep breaths. The intelligence he held was about the "magnetic stack."

'Although the magnetic stack isn't actually in my possession, old man Wang Ju is digging his own grave. Under the circumstances, there's no way the Alliance wouldn't choose me.'

RING RING RING!

The phone rang again.

Tang De answered. A seductive voice quickly came through the line.

"Brother Tang, I want to make some 'art' tonight..."

"What about old man Wang Ju? What's he up to?"

"What else could that old man be doing? He's guarding that thing, of course. By the way, when you went to save that useless son of yours today, you didn't tell the Alliance about the item, did you?" the seductive voice asked.

"No, of course not. What would I get for telling the Alliance right now? Merit? Hahaha... No merit is more important than you!"

"Brother Tang, you sure know how to make me happy. Since you say I'm so important, when are you going to come meet the 'Lord'? As long as you agree, what does old man Wang Ju matter? Then the item and I will both be yours, won't we?"

"Hahaha, that's not a decision I can make alone. I still need some time to think it over," Tang De demurred. He had no desire to dig his own grave like that old man Wang Ju.

"Hmph, men!" The seductive voice sounded a little displeased, but quickly continued, "Well then, let's get back to talking about creating art. You artistic types... so charming, yet so hard to please!"

"I'm all fired up right now. If you're coming, then come!"

"Hehe, then let me come and put out your fire..."

BEEP. BEEP BEEP!

The call ended.

Tang De tossed the phone aside and collapsed onto the sofa. "Where did it all go wrong? Why do I have such a bad feeling about this..."

...

On the other end of the line.

A woman with pointed, elf-like ears hung up the phone. Then, she turned and swiftly knelt before a figure shrouded in a black cloak.

"Hasn't Tang De given up the intelligence on the magnetic stack yet?" the dark figure asked.

"No. He probably hasn't settled on terms with the Alliance yet. If he had already given it to them, my usefulness to him would be over, and he wouldn't ask me to come over anymore," the woman replied respectfully.

"Mm, then put a little more pressure on him. As long as he leads the people from the Alliance Military Department to the factory, he'll have no other path to take," the dark figure nodded.

"If the people from the Military Department run into trouble because of his intelligence, it'll be impossible for Tang De to cooperate with the Alliance again. He'll have no choice but to submit to us. However, this subordinate heard from Tang De that a Major from the Alliance Military Department also came this time. Should we prepare more explosives at the factory?"

"A Major? Fine. Go make the arrangements."

"Yes!"

...

North Suburban Mental Hospital.

Shen Ning'Er had already slipped into the North Suburban Mental Hospital. She found a patient's gown to put on and even smeared some mud on her face.

"Mm, a perfect resemblance!" Shen Ning'Er muttered to herself while hiding in a corner outside the main gate. She undid her tied-up hair, letting it fall to cover half her face. She truly looked like a lunatic from the mental hospital.

Then, she began to wait.

Five minutes...

Ten minutes...

Fifteen minutes passed.

Gao Neng still hadn't arrived.

Shen Ning'Er was a little puzzled. She took out her tracking screen and glanced at it. Then, she discovered that the red dot on the screen seemed to have moved a long distance away from the mental hospital.

Its location...

It was continuously heading toward the Dream Toy Factory.

"???" Shen Ning'Er wondered.

...

Would Gao Neng enter the mental hospital?

Of course not!

He wasn't a psycho. His target was the Dream Toy Factory. The location in the metal storage device was very clear: the factory was the place to farm for cash.

Gao Neng moved continuously through the darkness, like a ghost in the night.

Twenty minutes later, he arrived at the main gate of the Dream Toy Factory. The time was exactly 10:00 PM.

A cold breeze blew past.

Gao Neng shivered for no apparent reason.

The Dream Toy Factory before him was utterly dark. The pitch-black factory building and its dilapidated main gate looked incredibly sinister.

Meanwhile, the Netherworld Currency and Paper Money scattered everywhere told him something else: an exorcism ritual had likely been performed here not long ago.

This was because, not far away, there lay a broken Peach Wood Sword stained with dried blood. 'Probably snapped by a ghost?'

Gao Neng looked at all this, not the least bit panicked. On the contrary, he kind of felt like singing.

"Speaking of which, the mental hospital is right next door. I wonder if this haunted place, besides the 'woman in red' and 'big-headed ghost doll' from the internet rumors, also has any female ghosts in patient gowns? Hmm... whatever kind of ghost it is, I'll smash them as they come. Tonight, there must be a slaughter!" Gao Neng strode forward, but his hand subconsciously tightened its grip on his hammer.

(Please vote with recommendation tickets!)

Chapter 27: That'll Teach You to Shriek

A chilling wind howled, the air thick with a ghostly presence.

In the darkness, sharp, scraping sounds would occasionally echo from within the abandoned Dream Toy Factory. It sounded like teeth gnawing on wooden planks, or perhaps fingernails scratching against metal.

Just as Gao Neng was about to step through the main gate, he felt a sudden gust of wind by his ear.

"SWISH!"

A black shadow shot out, rushing toward him at high speed.

Gao Neng had quick reflexes. He instinctively swung his hammer.

But he missed.

The black shadow leaped high into the air. Mid-flight, it repeatedly swiped its menacing claws, aiming for Gao Neng's face.

Just as it was about to connect, Gao Neng remained completely unfazed, swinging his hammer again with a backhand motion.

"MEOW!!!"

The feral cat retreated.

It was perfectly normal for a feral cat or stray dog to pop out in an abandoned factory like this.

Gao Neng had seen it all before. He simply wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and put on the "special mask" he had prepared.

When they said special, they really meant it.

Because this mask couldn't actually cover his mouth...

After all, it was cheap.

There was a hole in it when Gao Neng bought it. The vendor claimed it was a new, breathable model. Gao Neng didn't mind. After buying it, he stitched it up with a few white threads, making it look like a gaping, bloody maw baring its fangs.

Who's looking at the mask, anyway?

Gao Neng had perfect features, so he didn't pay much attention to such superficial things. After putting on the mask, he smeared some black mud on his face. Then, he started strapping on protective gear: a steel plate for his chest, and guards for his arms and legs.

Once everything was ready, he took another step forward and entered the gate of the Dream Toy Factory.

"WHOOSH!" A sinister wind stirred the leaves and dust on the ground, slowly swirling them into the air, where they seemed to form the face of a malevolent spirit.

"Nice weather we're having today. Perfect for hunting some ghosts!" Gao Neng grinned. The ghastly white mask crumpled inward, looking like a wailing specter.

Without further delay, he began to feel his way forward.

In the darkness, with only the wind for company, he moved with extreme care and caution. He was unhurried, steady as a rock.

However, he didn't know that no matter how steady he was, he had been spotted the moment he stepped into the Dream Toy Factory.

Because, just behind the main gate of the Dream Toy Factory, a surveillance camera was flashing with a faint light, slowly rotating to follow his movements.

...

Inside the Dream Toy Factory.

There was a surveillance room with only a single air vent. Inside were two computers, their screens displaying a grid of camera feeds.

Gao Neng was right there on one of the feeds, looking quite impressive.

"These guys really aren't afraid to die. We just offed one a few days ago, and now another one shows up?" a young man with yellowed teeth said, taking a drag from his cigarette with a cold smirk.

"What can you do? These bastards are poorer than the last, always thinking they can come in here and scavenge some scraps. But there's an upside: nobody cares if we kill 'em. Tsk, tsk... Thinking back to that chick last time... that taste... It was just too damn good. Too bad the higher-ups took her away after I only got to have my fun twice. Ptooeey!" the fatty next to him spat.

In the Forgotten Land, there was a very common profession: trash picking.

These people mostly came out at night, carrying large backpacks. Abandoned factories were their first choice and most frequented spots.

After all, you could always pry some screws or parts off the factory machines.

"Want to play? Didn't the bosses pay us today? If you want some fun, I'll take you out tonight," Huang Ya said. He then casually picked up the walkie-talkie on the table and shouted into it, "Hey, actor team, is the actor team there? Are you dead? If not, get up and get to work!"

"Here, here, here... We got a job? Is it a guy or a girl?" a cheerful voice came from the walkie-talkie.

"It's a guy, so don't even think about it. No fun for you, unless you swing that way. Right, the guy's almost at the workshop entrance now. I saw him scare off a feral cat just now, so he's probably an old hand at this. Be careful. Just scare him off and we're done. We'll knock off early today. I'll take you guys out to party tonight!"

"Alright! Which club are we hitting today, Brother Huang Ya?"

"A new one. Not telling you lot yet. You guys go do the scaring. Give me a shout when you're done. Fatty and I are gonna catch a quick nap. I'm planning to go three hundred rounds tonight!"

"Don't you worry and get some sleep, Brother Huang Ya. This isn't our first time. When it comes to scaring people... we're professionals!"

"CLACK!"

The walkie-talkie was tossed onto the table.

Huang Ya tilted his head back and took another drag of his cigarette.
"Professionals my ass. Just a bunch of damn temp actors. Still, they're dedicated enough. Ah, I'm dead tired. Gonna get some sleep. Fatty, grab me a pillow?"

"SNORE..." Fatty was already snoring beside him.

"Fuck!" Huang Ya cursed and closed his eyes.

「Meanwhile...」

A "ghost"—a figure draped in a white mosquito net, wearing a fake mask with a long tongue lolling out—carefully clipped the walkie-talkie to his belt.

"Alright boys, time to work!"

"Yeah..."

"Don't be lazy, every one of you! What is our dream? To be actors! Don't mind that what we're doing now is dirty, that we've killed a few people. That doesn't matter. Our souls are pure! We have a dream! Even if we're just temp actors right now, we must still live up to our roles. Do you understand?"

"Understood!"

"Very good. What is our objective?"

"Scare the piss out of him! Scare the piss out of him!"

"It's a shame... it's a guy. I'm not into that. It would've been fun if it were a girl. Alright boys, let's move out! This time, we're not just gonna scare the piss out of him, we're gonna scare the shit out of him too!"

"YEAH!"

The mob of ghosts scattered in all directions.

...

At the entrance of the Dream Toy Factory's workshop.

The farther Gao Neng walked, the more he felt that something was wrong. He could actually hear the sound of wind, as if someone was breathing right next to his ear.

'Could there really be ghosts?' Gao Neng wiped his sweat again.

Just as he was thinking this, a clap of thunder exploded by his ear.

It was as if lightning had flashed.

And in that brief flash of light, he saw a corpse hanging from a tree at the workshop's entrance. Its face was pale, its tongue lolled out a good half-meter, and it was wrapped in a white robe from which red blood dripped steadily.

So scary!

So terrifying!

So horrifying!

Gao Neng froze instantly.

And most importantly, as his gaze fell upon that pale face, he got the distinct feeling that it was smiling at him.

'As expected, that's the expression!' The ghost hanging from the tree grinned. He reveled in the feeling of scaring people out of their minds. Then, he began to let out a sinister laugh.

"HEHEHE..."

On top of that, he also started to squirm.

CREAK... CREAK...

As his body writhed like a snake, the tree branch let out a cringe-inducing groan.

Then, he saw Gao Neng move.

He dashed forward in a single bound, right hand raised high.

The ghost was shocked.

But he was an actor. He had professional integrity. As long as he wore this costume, then in his heart, he became a vengeful spirit.

This was scientifically proven.

Many examples proved this point. When a person put on a performance costume, they could easily perform actions they couldn't manage during normal training.

This was a display of surpassing one's limits.

Therefore, even though he was shocked, at this most dangerous moment, he wouldn't make a single human sound. He would only shriek like a ghost.

"AIIIEEE... HEHE!"

"THUD!"

The hammer fell, and the ghostly shriek came to an abrupt halt.

"That's for shrieking and scaring me!"

I Can Control Resources

Eighteen years of life in the Forgotten Land had left Gao Neng utterly poor, but it had also given him a standard for judging bad people.

Would a good person run to a factory in the middle of the night to dress up as a ghost and scare people?

No!

That settled it.

As for other things, like why the person was pretending to be a ghost, or why they were doing it here... he didn't give any of it a second thought.

All he knew was that he'd been startled.

Not because the ghost was too terrifying, but because it had appeared too suddenly.

In fact, the moment the ghost appeared, his newly acquired Eye of Deprivation had activated. He saw with a single glance that the other party was an ugly, weaselly-faced man.

In that case, Gao Neng couldn't be blamed for being ruthless.

'Ugly and still trying to cause trouble?!'

Gao Neng brought his hammer down, and the "ghost" was smashed directly to the ground. Its white robes tore open, revealing a pair of short, hairy legs.

"Ding! Congratulations, Host, for knocking out a 'ghost.' However, there is no reward. Are you happy?"

'Happy my ass!' Gao Neng ignored the system and began to search the ghost's body. 'Since it told me to beat people up for money, this ghost must have some, right?'

As he searched, his eyes lit up.

There really was money!

A huge sum, at that.

Gao Neng did a quick count. There was at least close to 500 Alliance Coins.

"I've hit a small jackpot." Gao Neng had never had so much pocket money before. He had no idea that today was the "ghosts'" payday.

But none of that mattered. What was important was that he could really get money this way.

Using his top-student logic, Gao Neng calculated: one ghost was 500, so ten ghosts would be 5,000, and twenty ghosts would be 10,000?

'Does that mean the mission is complete?'

'No, no, the mission target isn't 10,000 Alliance Coins, it's 100,000 Alliance Coins.'

'Which means...'

'I have to beat up 200 ghosts?!'

"Are there even that many ghosts here?" Gao Neng was a little surprised. 'An abandoned toy factory is hiding 200 ghosts? No way. That's ridiculous, right?'

Just as he was thinking this, he saw another one.

And this time, it was a female ghost in a long red dress and red high heels, with glaring red eyes and blood-soaked red hair.

The female ghost was floating leisurely out of the factory building, its feet not even touching the ground.

Combined with the surrounding environment...

...it was truly terrifying. (Don't laugh, I'm serious! ≡(¯ ̄)≡)

"Aieee... Aieee..." The female ghost let out a shrill, ghostly wail as it floated toward Gao Neng, a bloody scent wafting from it.

In the end, Gao Neng couldn't hold it in.

He laughed!

'It's another dude in drag!'

Without another word, Gao Neng lifted his hammer and charged. After all, one ghost was 500 Alliance Coins! That was money!

"Aieee... Huh? Eeh??" The female ghost was in mid-wail when it saw Gao Neng charging at him, an iron hammer raised in his hand.

It took him a moment to process what was happening.

"???"

'What's going on?!'

The female ghost was startled. It was about to try and scare him again when its gaze fell upon the white-robed ghost lying on the ground.

'He's down?'

'Did he get hammered?'

'Is this guy a trash collector? No... this guy must be a psycho!' The female ghost turned to run, but it was too late.

THUD!

With a dull thud...

...the female ghost collapsed.

"Another one down? At this rate, 200 ghosts in one night isn't just a dream!" Gao Neng bent down, lifted the female ghost's skirt, and patted the body down. Sure enough, he found nearly another 500 Alliance Coins.

Having knocked down two ghosts in a row, Gao Neng's confidence soared.

'Sure enough, after breaking through the first human limit, my strength is on a whole new level. One hit, one takedown. They can't even run away. It's an absolute steamroll.'

One thousand Alliance Coins secured.

Remaining ghosts: 198.

'So, should I bury these two ghosts first, or keep looking for more?'

Gao Neng remembered the mission reminder being very clear: hammer, wrench, shovel—not one could be missing. The hammer's purpose was pretty clear now.

The wrench also seemed decent enough.

But it seemed the shovel hadn't been used yet.

'It must be for burying the ghosts, right?'

Gao Neng thought about it. 'The system wouldn't lie to me, but digging holes to bury them now would be a waste of time.'

'I should hammer a few more ghosts first, then bury them all together.'

Just as he was thinking about finding more ghosts...

...the ghosts came looking for him.

Two of them, in fact.

However, these two ghosts were a little different from the previous two. They wore ghost costumes, but they were holding gleaming weapons.

"What kind of psycho is this, daring to cause trouble here?!" one ghost said, baring his menacing fangs as he looked at the red and white figures on the ground.

"Dammit, he dared to attack our brothers!" The other ghost was dressed as a zombie and was holding a rusty chainsaw that let out a terrifying, grinding noise.

Gao Neng didn't hold back.

He went right in, hammer swinging.

"Ouch, hey, buddy, you're strong..."

"Aaaah... Murder!"

"Where the hell did this psycho come from? Don't tell me he's from the North Suburban Mental Hospital? Agh... let me go! Buddy, we can talk this out!"

THUD!

THUD!

After a bout of close-quarters combat, the two ghosts were hammered to the ground.

Gao Neng tilted his head up at a forty-five-degree angle and gazed at the sky. 'It's lonely at the top.'

'So thrilling!'

He found nearly 1,000 Alliance Coins on these two ghosts. The sense of accomplishment made him a little cocky.

"A total of four ghosts, a harvest of nearly 2,000 Alliance Coins. Keep it up, Gao Neng, you can do it!" Gao Neng gave himself a pep talk and resumed his search.

He circled the factory entrance a few more times.

Not a ghost in sight.

He started to head into the factory.

'If there were four ghosts outside, there must be even more inside the factory, right?'

The factory was pitch-black. There were no lights, only a few assembly line-like machine consoles and some tattered dolls tossed in a corner.

Gao Neng went in with his hammer and searched the area.

Nothing.

He searched again.

Still nothing.

"No way. Are there only four ghosts in total?" Gao Neng realized something was wrong. 'What happened to the 200 ghosts I was promised? How come I've only found 4?'

Gao Neng wasn't ready to give up. 'The system can't be lying to me. There must be more ghosts in this factory. If not, I'll just check another building.'

Just as he was thinking this, a hand landed on his shoulder.

"Hehehe..." A cold laughter abruptly echoed in the darkness, bringing an involuntary, scalp-tingling thrill.

Gao Neng was already used to it and didn't panic at all. He swung his hammer in a backhand motion, but this time, he unexpectedly missed.

'No problem!'

'Time for the wrench!'

'Missed again?'

Gao Neng missed twice in a row. His opponent seemed extremely agile, nimbly dodging his consecutive hammer and wrench attacks.

"Hehehe..." The cold laughter continued.

In the pitch-black factory, Gao Neng couldn't see the person's face. Through the dim moonlight, he could vaguely make out a figure in a mental hospital patient's uniform standing behind him, constantly letting out that strange laugh.

"Eat hammer!" Gao Neng charged again.

The figure jumped back again.

Then, it resumed laughing.

"Hehehe..." And this time, after laughing, the figure actually started dancing. It danced and laughed, its hands making a powerful clapping rhythm.

"You clap one, I clap one, you clap two, I clap two..."

(It's Monday! A new week! Time to climb the rankings! Whether or not I can make it onto the charts this week is all up to you, my dear family! Recommendation

votes, rewards, bookmarks, I want them all! The most important things are recommendation votes, recommendation votes, recommendation votes!)

Chapter 29: Learn to Meow with Me

'This isn't a ghost, this is a psycho, right?' Gao Neng made an accurate assessment immediately. Then, his grip on the hammer in his hand tightened.

He was sure this one was different from the other four. At the very least, this woman was clearly pretending to be a psycho, not a ghost.

"Big brother, can you come and dance with me?" Just as he was thinking, the female psycho in the hospital gown hopped in front of him again.

It looked like she wasn't afraid of Gao Neng's hammer at all.

"Dance? Sure! What do you want to dance?" Gao Neng nodded. 'Running out here in the middle of the night to act like a psycho... just wait till you get a little closer, and see if I don't hammer you to death.'

"What dance? Oh... Let's play a clapping game!" The female psycho continued clapping her hands as she gradually approached Gao Neng.

"Sure, let's play the clapping game!" Gao Neng nodded again.

"You clap one, I clap one, you clap two, I clap two..." The woman arrived in front of Gao Neng with a harmless expression, extending her grimy hands toward his.

In an instant, Gao Neng was already swinging the hammer in his hand.

He was looking for a tricky angle to bring the hammer down. As long as it connected, she would definitely go down immediately.

But just as his hammer was halfway raised...

He got a clear look at the woman's face. She had a somewhat charming face, half-hidden by her hair. On the visible half, you could see that the corners of her eyes tilted up slightly. Her face was grimy; she wasn't gorgeous, but she wasn't ugly either.

But that wasn't the point.

The point was that deep beneath this face, after peeling it back layer by layer with his Eye of Deprivation, he saw the true face hidden within.

Perfect features, bright eyes, as exquisite as a painting, and brimming with a heroic spirit.

Although Gao Neng had only seen this face once, a girl with this level of beauty had left a rather deep impression on him.

'What the hell...'

'Are you sure this isn't Shen Ning'Er?!'

CLANG!

The hammer slipped from his grasp and fell to the ground. Along with the hammer, the wrench he had hidden in his other hand also dropped.

...

My name is Gao Neng!

And I'm panicking like crazy right now.

'Shen Ning'Er is a psycho from the North Suburban Mental Hospital?'

'And she's about to make me play a clapping game with her, and worst of all, I have no choice but to play along?'

Gao Neng stared blankly at the woman holding out both her hands.

He was so scared he felt like he was about to have a heart attack.

"Come on, big brother, let's play!" Shen Ning'Er reached out and clapped Gao Neng's palm once, then blinked, waiting for his response.

"O-Okay..." Gao Neng focused all his mental energy on calming himself down. Then, he started playing the clapping game, following Shen Ning'Er's rhythm.

"You clap three, I clap three, you clap four, I clap four..."

A wonderful rhythm echoed through the abandoned factory.

Meanwhile, Huang Ya and Fatty, who had been dozing off in front of the monitors, woke up.

Then, they both saw the same thing on the surveillance screen: a guy with a big black bag and a face mask playing a clapping game with a woman in a hospital gown inside the factory.

"???" Huang Ya's face was a question mark.

"..." Fatty was just as stunned.

"What are you seeing?" Huang Ya asked.

"A scavenger and... a female psycho? Are they... playing a clapping game?" Fatty said slowly, his expression weird.

"Damn it, what the hell are those four idiots playing ghost doing? How did they let these two into the factory? Do they not want their jobs anymore?!"

"Brother Huang Ya, look outside the factory!"

"Huh?!" Huang Ya followed Fatty's finger and looked at the camera feed for the factory entrance. A chill shot straight up his spine.

Because lying there were four "ghosts" in different costumes.

And they were arranged quite neatly.

"What do we do, Brother Huang Ya? Should we go out and finish those two off right now?" Fatty clenched his fists.

"No, something's very wrong. There's a problem. They took out four people in one go. With just the two of us, we might not be able to handle them. We have to report this immediately!" Huang Ya decided at once.

"Report it? There are only two of them... Is that necessary?" Fatty was unconvinced. He was confident that with the element of surprise, he could have taken out those four "extras" outside the door himself.

"You don't know shit. You know who dies the fastest?"

"Who?"

"People who are stupid enough, just like you are right now, full of yourself! If we report it, whether or not the higher-ups deal with it is their problem. But if we don't report it and something goes wrong, it becomes our problem!"

"Right, Brother Huang Ya, you really are our boss. You think of everything. Should we report it to the higher-ups right now?" Fatty was instantly enlightened.

"Calling, calling... this is the factory monitoring room!" Huang Ya had already grabbed his walkie-talkie before Fatty could reply.

"What is it?"

"There's a scavenger and a female psycho in the factory. They're extremely dangerous... They took out the four extras, and now they're... dancing in the factory..."

"Dancing what?"

"Looks like they're playing a clapping game. No, wait, they're not playing that anymore. I think... they're meowing like cats?" Huang Ya felt a toothache coming on.

"..."

...

In fact, Huang Ya wasn't the only one with a toothache.

Gao Neng's teeth were aching quite a bit, too. Because Shen Ning'Er was indeed meowing like a cat, and she was doing it while still playing the clapping game.

'What the hell kind of plot is this?'

'Wait!'

'That's not right!'

'Why is Shen Ning'Er here?'

'She's following me!'

'Yes, she must be following me. But why would Shen Ning'Er follow me?'

Gao Neng wasn't entirely sure. Most importantly, he was in disguise and wearing a large face mask. How did Shen Ning'Er track him?

'Has she recognized me or not?'

'It's a coincidence. This must be a coincidence. Maybe Shen Ning'Er is on some kind of mission, and we just happened to run into each other. Yes... that's it!' Gao Neng felt a chill on his back.

But after she finished meowing, Shen Ning'Er suddenly stopped and stared at him with an ice-cold gaze.

"Why aren't you meowing?" Shen Ning'Er stopped moving, her cheeks puffed out. She looked furious, as if she was ready to start a fight at the slightest disagreement.

"Why should I meow?" Gao Neng had calmed down. He didn't know why Shen Ning'Er was acting like a psycho, but he knew a man had to take the initiative.

He couldn't let Shen Ning'Er keep leading him around by the nose like this.

"Let's have a contest to see who's better at it," Shen Ning'Er said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Why have a contest?"

"If I win, you give me ten Alliance Coins. If I lose, I'll give you one hundred Alliance Coins. How about it?" Shen Ning'Er was very direct.

"..." Gao Neng was speechless.

'She can't actually be a psycho, right?'

'Is this really Shen Ning'Er?'

"Come on, big brother, copy me. MEOW MEOW MEOW..."

"MEOW MEOW MEOW." Gao Neng complied.

"Big brother, you're so good at it! I lose. Here's a hundred Alliance Coins for you." After saying that, Shen Ning'Er took out one hundred Alliance Coins and threw them on the ground.

"!!!" Gao Neng's eyes practically bulged out of his head.

'She's really paying me?!'

'She actually gave me money?'

'Could it be that the real goal of this mission isn't to fight ghosts, but to meow like a cat with Shen Ning'Er? System... you really are something else.'

"Then let's do a tiger's roar next."

"Sure," Gao Neng agreed readily this time.

"AWOO AWOO..." Shen Ning'Er began.

"AWOO!" Gao Neng's roar was even more powerful.

"I lose again, here's another hundred. Let's do a bird's call next. CHIRP CHIRP CHIRP..."

"CHIRP CHIRP CHIRP!"

"Oh dear, I lost again. Another hundred for you. Next, let's do a sheep's bleat. BAA BAA BAA..."

"BAA BAA BAA!"

"Another hundred for you. Now, a mouse's squeak. SQUEAK SQUEAK SQUEAK..."

"SQUEAK..."

(It's Monday, the start of a new week! My dear readers, brothers and sisters, if you don't cast your recommendation votes, we're going to fall off the rankings! Ahem... and a big thanks to the super-handsome "Xin Yi" for the donation. Mwah!)

Chapter 30: New Task: Nightmare Difficulty

Gao Neng choked back the last few squeaks. It wasn't that his reaction was slow, but that it was too fast. The moment he let out the first squeak, he understood what was happening.

A trap!

He'd been trapped?!

He, the straight-A student Gao Neng, had actually been trapped!

'What should I do in a situation like this?'

'Damage control! Right, I have to find a way to fix this!'

In his subconscious, a voice was constantly reminding him. 'In times like these, I have to stay calm. Traps can be broken... right, they can be broken, can't they?'

'So, should I just admit defeat and give Shen Ning'Er ten Alliance Coins? Or should I try to force a change in my voice and produce a squeak different from last night's?'

Just as he was thinking, he suddenly realized something was wrong.

Because the Shen Ning'Er in front of him was no longer acting crazy. Her gaze had become extremely sharp, and with a BOOM, her aura surged forth.

"Gao Neng, it really is you!"

"What 'it's me'? I... holy shit!" Gao Neng was jolted awake. This wasn't just one trap, this was a damn double trap!

'A combo-trap!'

In the instant he hesitated.

She'd suddenly oppressed him with her powerful aura, and then forcefully called him out by name!

Shen Ning'Er's decisiveness was absolutely unprecedented.

If Gao Neng really hadn't done it, he wouldn't have hesitated when Shen Ning'Er asked him to squeak like a mouse with her. But he did hesitate, because he really had done it.

It was a subconscious reaction, one that was hard to get right. What Shen Ning'Er was testing wasn't the mouse squeak at all, but whether Gao Neng would pause, whether he would hesitate.

With Gao Neng's hesitation, Shen Ning'Er was already seventy percent certain.

Then came the second, fatal blow.

In the instant Gao Neng's mind was racing, trying to figure out how to break the trap and do damage control, she decisively struck again, using a confident tone to forcefully pin the crime on him.

Gao Neng instantly panicked.

And with that panic...

'My guilt is pretty much confirmed, isn't it?!'

"You've already recognized me, haven't you? Why were you able to recognize me? What are you hiding, and who sent you?!" Having succeeded twice, Shen Ning'Er immediately launched her third assault.

"..." Cold sweat poured down Gao Neng's face. It wasn't because Shen Ning'Er's aura was too oppressive, but because... he seemed to have hesitated again?!

'So, doesn't that prove I really did recognize Shen Ning'Er?'

'Mom, the city's full of traps! I wanna go back to the country!'

'Wait!'

'I'm pretty much in the country already, aren't I?'

This time, Gao Neng didn't hesitate. With the hand speed he'd honed over eighteen years of single life, he snatched the fallen hammer from the ground and swung it down at Shen Ning'Er.

SMACK!

Shen Ning'Er shot out her hand and caught the hammer.

Then, Gao Neng witnessed a terrifying scene...

The very hammer that had once knocked out four ghosts was melting at a visible rate. In the blink of an eye, the hammerhead was gone, leaving only a bare handle.

"Assaulting a Major twice in a row... that's not a light crime, you know," Shen Ning'Er sneered, black iron energy flowing in her palm.

'I'll risk it all!'

'Take down Shen Ning'Er!'

Gao Neng really wanted to be like a true man and just take her down now that he was pushed into a corner. But reality told him that the Shen Ning'Er before him was an Energy Warrior, and an Energy Warrior who had mastered Energy Manifestation at that.

That meant Shen Ning'Er had broken through the human body's limits at least three times.

And him?

Even with his fully maxed-out hidden talents, until he became an Energy Warrior, he was just a little weakling who had only just broken through the first human body limit...

'Running is the only way!'

His strike having missed, Gao Neng turned and ran.

"Trying to run? Are you sure you can get away?" Shen Ning'Er's smile grew even brighter. With a flick of her hand, the flowing black iron energy shot out.

"Fall!"

With a soft cry.

Gao Neng went down.

Because he hadn't even taken three steps before he felt something tighten around his ankles.

THUD!

Gao Neng hit the ground. Fortunately, he was still agile enough that the moment his feet were bound, he immediately went into a push-up position to land on his hands first.

But even so, inertia carried him forward, sliding him nearly a meter.

'I have a great future ahead of me, I have to get away!' After falling, Gao Neng's first instinct was to get up and run again, but his feet were bound tightly by something, and he couldn't move them at all.

'Is this like one of those golden fillets?'

He felt for it...

Gao Neng's heart went cold.

It wasn't a golden fillet, but it wasn't far off.

It was an iron ring!

'So, Shen Ning'Er literally turned my hammer into an iron ring and put it on my feet? Energy Warriors are badass!'

"Hahaha, a crazy lady?"

"And a trash-picker. You two having fun?"

"Want a few 'uncles' to come play with you?"

Just as Gao Neng was wondering whether he should just play dead or put up one last futile struggle, several middle-aged men and youths, armed with machetes and iron bars, emerged from the darkness.

"Looks like this factory... is a little unusual, huh?" Shen Ning'Er blinked, her gaze sweeping over the men and youths surrounding them.

"Of course it's unusual. Little sis, you're from the North Suburban Mental Hospital next door, right? Then you should know whose turf this is."

"Wang Ju?" Shen Ning'Er said, seemingly lost in thought.

"Yo, little sis actually knows. Then there's nothing more to say. Stay and have some fun with us uncles," one of the men said with a wicked grin.

"I'm going first this time!"

"Leave her for me, leave her for me! This chick's got a great body!"

"Tsk tsk tsk, I'm drooling... Holy shit?!"

The youths were all scrambling to be first, but their expressions quickly changed.

Because a massive Iron Dragon was surging from Shen Ning'Er's hand. It was an Iron Dragon a full ten meters long, covered in thick Scale Armor that shimmered with a ghostly light.

"An Energy Warrior!"

"This crazy lady is an Energy Warrior?!"

"..."

The men and youths were stunned.

Gao Neng was also stunned.

Because he noticed this Iron Dragon seemed a little different. It was no longer pure black; a white light now flowed between its scales.

'It devoured the charcoal!'

'It's no longer pure iron, but has advanced to pig iron, and it's already starting to transform into refined steel. This is a damn steel dragon on the verge of becoming sentient!'

ROAR!

The Steel Giant Dragon let out a furious roar.

The entire factory trembled.

"DING! Host detected to be in imminent danger of being obliterated. Initiate new life-saving mission prematurely?" Just then, a mechanical voice suddenly sounded in Gao Neng's ear.

'There's a deal this good? A new mission can save my life... right? Initiate!' Gao Neng froze for a second, then grinned. For the first time, he felt this system was actually pretty reliable.

"BEEP. Prematurely initiating new mission: If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again!"

"Mission Objective: Take down Shen Ning'Er again within one hour. (A warrior can endure some things, but this is intolerable! How dare a defeated foe act so brazenly? If I can take you down once, I can take you down twice! The passion of youth needs no explanation. A man is just that dominant, just that capable!)"

"Please select a difficulty, Host!"

"!!!" This time, Gao Neng was truly dumbfounded. 'A life-saving mission... is to take down Shen Ning'Er? If I could fucking take down Shen Ning'Er, would I need you to save my life?'

'Wait!'

'The hints! Right, every mission has hints.'

"Please select a difficulty, Host. 1 minute remaining."

'Select your sister?! Hurry up and give me the hints! Give me both hints! I'd have to be a damn idiot to choose Nightmare, you moronic system...'

"DING! Host has successfully selected Nightmare difficulty!"

(Gao Neng: I'm about to die here, and you guys still aren't giving recommendation tickets?! That moron Xin Yi said that if you don't give recommendation tickets, I'll really die!)